

Lake Elmo City Council January 2, 2007	Agenda Section: CITY ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT	<u>No 11B.</u>
<u>Agenda Item:</u> Request to contract for consulting planning services on as needed basis.		
<p><u>Purpose</u> The city council is being asked to authorize the interim city administrator to enter into an agreement for planning consulting services. The consulting planner would work on an as needed basis, which is estimated at between 5 and 25 hours per week. The planner would be available some hours in Lake Elmo each week for easy access for residents, property owners and staff. The planner would also be the lead staff to the planning commission meetings. Three firms were contacted for these services. Two firms responded with proposals: TKDA and Schoell Madson. The firm of Schoell Madson is being recommended primarily for three reasons: 1) because the firms' services are provided by planners with extensive prior experience working in city government as planner, 2) the firm currently acts as the city planner for several small municipalities and 3) the hourly rate of the senior planner providing the service is \$ 90 per hour. This is slightly less than the 2006 senior planner rates in TKDA that range from \$ 102.33 to \$114.24 per hour. It is anticipated that the Schoell Madson planning services will complement the services that TKDA already provides to the city as its city engineer and comprehensive park planner.</p> <p><u>Related information.</u> The best way for a city to protect and plan for its land resources is to proactively, systematically and accurately implement its planning tools through the comprehensive plan and the zoning code. Without having the systems and expertise in place to do this, the city may inadvertently give inaccurate information that leads to building that is inconsistent with city codes. In addition, the residents and property owners inquiring about planning related information need to get accurate information and understand the process by which their planning requests are being considered.</p> <p>Given this, the city council requested the interim city administrator to evaluate the staffing needs required to provide efficient and effective services during the transition created by the resignation of the planning director as well as by the absence of the city administrator, whose position is being filled internally by the finance director. After evaluating the staffing needs over the past few weeks, it became clear that the city needs a senior planner, with experience in municipal planning; available to the city on a regular basis is critical to meeting the needs of residents, property owners, other parties and the staff. The assistant planner, Kelli Matzek, serves a valuable role in providing planning services for the city. Both her education and prior planning experience is a valuable foundation for her work here which began, in July 2006. Nevertheless, the extent and depth of planning topics in the city requires additional staff time and more experienced personnel to provide planning services and proactively anticipate planning issues. In particular, engaging someone who is very experienced with the statutory requirements and best practices for processing planning applications is a good idea.</p> <p>The on-going availability of a senior planner who is very familiar with land use statutory requirements and has developed a methodical approach to managing planning applications within the 60 day time frame, will reduce the amount of time spent with the city attorney on land use issues and minimize the city's legal exposure under the 60 day rule. Which, as you know, if not meticulously followed can result in unanticipated building and/or lawsuits. In addition, the work and expertise required for revising key sections, if the not entire zoning code requires a planner that can not only evaluate and recommend zoning code language, but can also take the role in organizing the process with informative documents and meeting formats to communicate proposed changes in the zoning code to property owners. (To put this in perspective, the 11 zoning code districts being considered for amendments by the planning commission potentially affect 3,000 parcels and potentially 2,400 property owners).</p> <p><u>Fees for service</u> Typically, cities charge applicants for planning requests and the cost for all consulting services required in processing a planning application through planning fees.</p> <p><u>Review and recommendation.</u> Both TKDA and Schoell Madson demonstrate solid experience in providing local planning services. After reviewing the information, researching the two firms' experience in serving as a contracted city planner to cities in the metropolitan area and evaluating the costs for the service, the staff recommends that the city council authorize the interim city administrator to enter into an agreement with Schoell Madson for consulting planning services on an as needed basis.</p>		
<u>Action Items</u> Move to authorize the interim city administrator to proceed with an agreement for consulting planning services on an as-needed basis with Schoell Madson.	<u>Person responsible:</u> Tom Bouthilet, Interim Administrator	

Attachments:

1. Information on Schoell Madson planning services.
2. Information on TKDA planning services.

Time Allocated:

To be determined by city council.